



Town of Montague
Department, Board, Committee, Commission
BUDGET NARRATIVE

FY 24

Complete this form electronically! Be clear and concise!

Department: Town Counsel (151) Submitted by: Steve Ellis

1. Please describe and provide the rationale for any notable changes in your FY24 budget request.

The Town continues to manage its legal budget to the best of its ability and requests a level-funded budget for labor and general counsel in FY24 (\$75,000) as well as additional funds (\$5,000) to support the need for legal consult as we enter what is believed to be the final year of a protracted settlement process in relation to FirstLight Power's relicensing through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

The additional funding reflects and ongoing need for specialized legal expertise in federal relicensing processes and related agreements. In FY23, the Selectboard has thus far allocated \$2,500 of unallocated community development discretionary funds for this purpose as we jointly secured such support with three other towns (each paying equal share) and the FRCOG (paying a \$10,000 share). We anticipate these funds will be expended by the end of FY23 and the need for additional guidance as the process moves forward.

2. To this point in FY23, have you enhanced or expanded the programs and services you provide, or implemented new tools or technology that you'd like the Finance Committee and Selectboard to know about? Please describe.

The Town completed negotiation of its four distinct union contracts in the opening months of FY23 and is managing a variety of legal conversations pertaining to ongoing business of the Town. We brought KP Law in to provide training to staff and board/committee members pertaining to open meeting law, public records and conflict of interest, which we expect be further revisited with staff later this year. We were able to secure that training support at no added cost to the Town.

3. Are there presently challenges to your department's ability to meet its goals and requirements due to its FY23 operating budget? If so, offer any your recommendations you may have for improving the situation in FY24.

We are on pace to fully expend the FY23 budget but at this point in time are not neglecting use of counsel where it is needed. The spend rate reflects necessary work, but is also impacted by an increase in the hourly rate from \$195 to \$205 (5%) this year. That rate had been in place for several years. The legal counsel budget has been reduced over time to better reflect actual spend rates, from \$98,000 in FY19 to \$75,000 in FY23. I believe we can stay within its confines, allowing for the special counsel line, for at least one more year.

4. Did you receive funding for any special articles in FY22 or FY23? Please list them and share the current status of those expenditures/projects.

N/A